

## How to survey for otter and water vole

**Otters: Oct 2019-June 2020**

**Previous experience or otter spraint ID course essential**

Each site needs to be visited at least once between October 1, 2019 and June 30, 2020 and is counted as **positive** if you find one or more otter spraints (droppings) or verifiable footprints. Feeding signs are of interest but can be difficult to attribute to otters with complete confidence. We can only record these signs to indicate **possible** otter presence.

### Access

Many of the sites are accessible via public rights of way. If the site is on private land the landowner's permission needs to be obtained before entry. If you make contact with a landowner please ask if they are willing to give contact details so we can inform them of the results of the survey.

### Submitting your findings

We have teamed up with **The Mammal Society** to use their **Mammal Mapper** app to record your survey in real time. This means you do not have to fill in any forms and your records will come straight to us. Please see the instructions overleaf on how to use this software. If you do not have access to a smart phone, or are not keen on using this sort of technology you can still record your information on the forms provided. The form can be sent by post to:-

**Natalie Singleton, Essex Wildlife Trust, Abbots Hall Farm, Gt Wigborough, Essex, CO5 7RZ or via email to [riverw@essexwt.org.uk](mailto:riverw@essexwt.org.uk).**

Please complete the record sheet even if the site is negative and return completed recording forms before the end of July.

**All the RIVERSEARCH survey guides and forms can be downloaded from [www.essexrivershub.org.uk](http://www.essexrivershub.org.uk) - just click on Volunteer Wardens > Riversearch**

### How to conduct your otter survey

Start your survey on the **Mammal Mapper** app using the survey code EWTRS (or use a recording sheet/notepad to keep a tally) and search a total of 600m of bank. You can walk either side of the river and in any direction from the starting point. Try to choose a route with easy access or good features such as silt bars, ledges under bridges, obvious large trees or channel debris that is easily checked.

As soon as you find any signs record the location on the app along with a photo, or keep a record of the location on paper. As soon as a spraint is found you can record the site as **positive** but do continue to the end of the survey as you may find other signs.

Footprints **MUST** be accompanied by a photo in order for us to verify a positive record.

If no signs are found still submit your survey on the Mammal Mapper (or record the site as **negative** on your record form) as we need to know where otters are still absent

Please record any signs or sightings of other mammals too, especially **mink** and **water voles** (see How to conduct your water vole survey).



**Otter**  
**Roger Hance**



**Otter spraint on raised log showing fish scales and bones**



**Otter footprints have 5 teardrop shaped toes**



## Water voles: March 2020-June 2020

### Previous experience or water vole field signs ID course essential

Unlike otters, water vole signs are more easily found during the breeding season from March onwards. Because riverside vegetation becomes very dense over the summer it is best to survey in April and May but we will accept any surveys up to the end of June.

### How to conduct your water vole survey

The strongholds for water vole are along the coastal borrow dykes, ditches, streams and drains of the Dengie, Rochford and Tendring peninsulas but small colonies are still clinging on inland. If you have been on a water vole training course and are confident looking for water vole signs then do so while undertaking your otter survey either using the **Mammal Mapper** app, or paper recording forms as detailed on the previous page. The main signs you need to look out for in the vegetation close to the water's edge are:

- **Latrines or droppings.** These are distinctive, 'tic tac' shape and size, often brown or green and the best evidence for water vole presence.
- **Feeding stations or signs.** Vegetation is left cut up in piles along the water's edge, often with a distinctive 45° cut angle on the ends. Again a good indicator of water vole presence.
- **Burrows.** Usually close to water level with a track running straight down into the water (rats often link their burrows with greasy pathways up and along the banks). **Burrows alone are not enough to prove water vole presence.**

Please take photos of any signs you see for verification, and record them on the app or your recording sheet/notepad along with the location. You can submit your findings with your otter survey as detailed above.



Water vole  
Charlie Oliver

Below L-R  
Latrine of 'tic tac' shaped  
droppings, feeding signs  
and water vole burrows



### How to survey with the Mammal Mapper app

#### Please use the survey ID code EWTRS

The Mammal Society have set up their Mammal Mapper app to record the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Essex Otter Survey and give us instant access to your records. The app contains photos and information of our UK terrestrial mammal species so you don't have to limit your records to **otter**, **water vole** and **mink**.

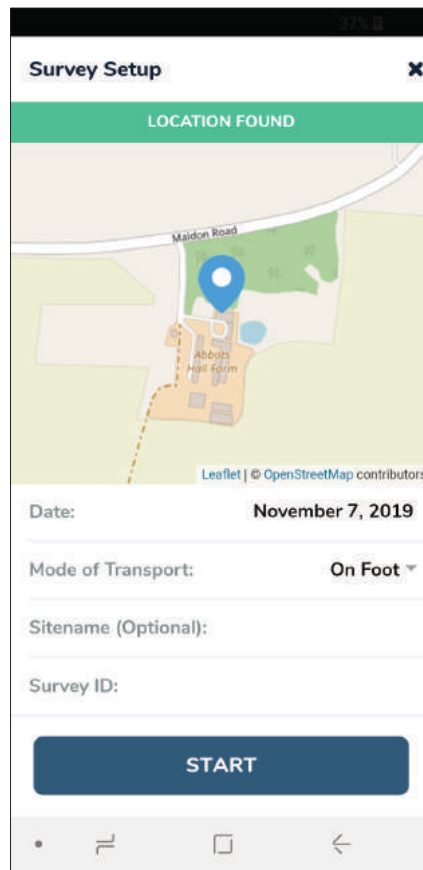
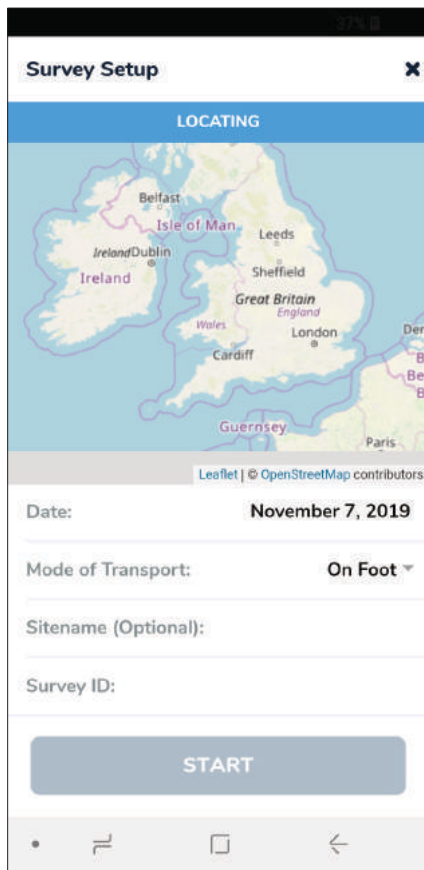
First download the app onto your phone or tablet by searching for Mammal Mapper on Google Play Store or the iPhone Store.

Following this step by step picture guide use the app to conduct your survey. It will even record the distance you have travelled as you move along the river so you will know when you have completed your survey.

Please use the code for Essex Wildlife Trust Riversearch EWTRS when you start your survey

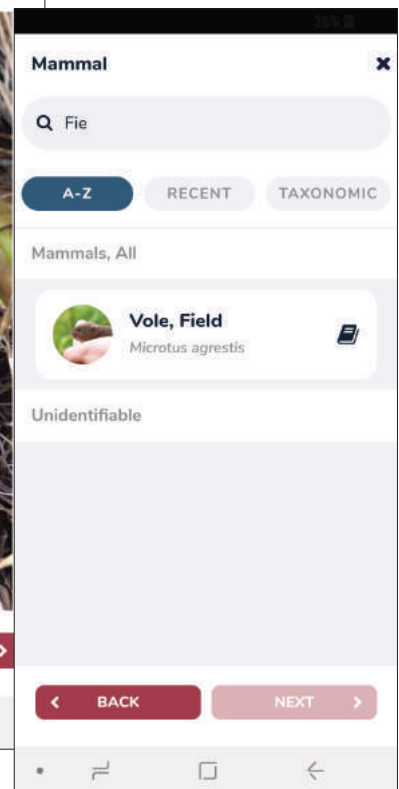
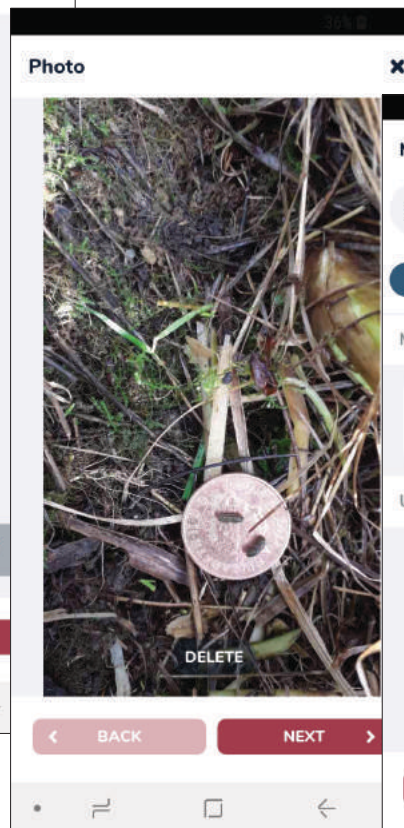
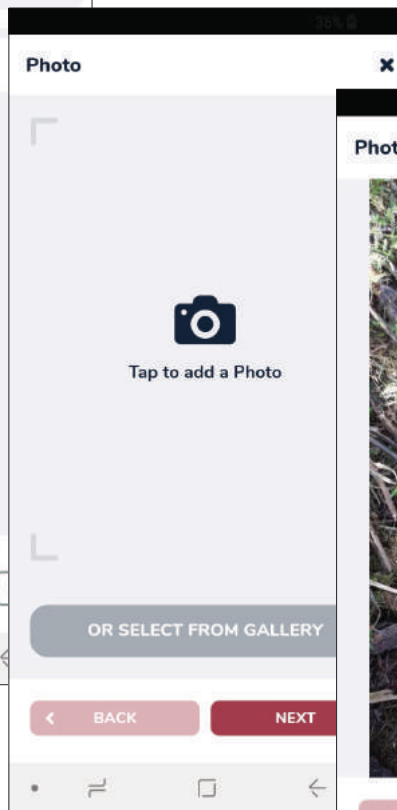
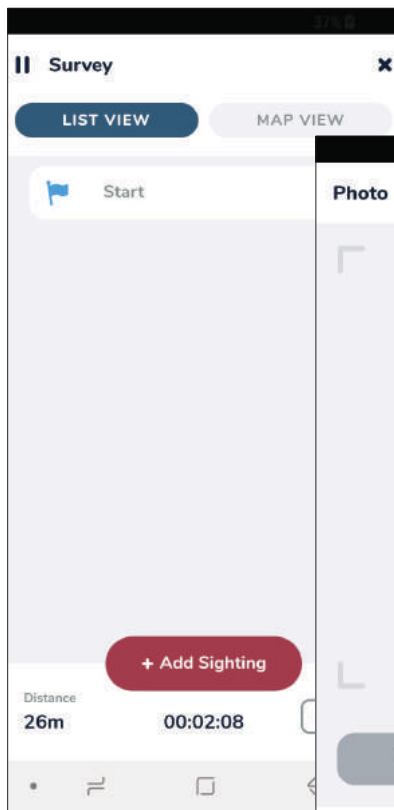
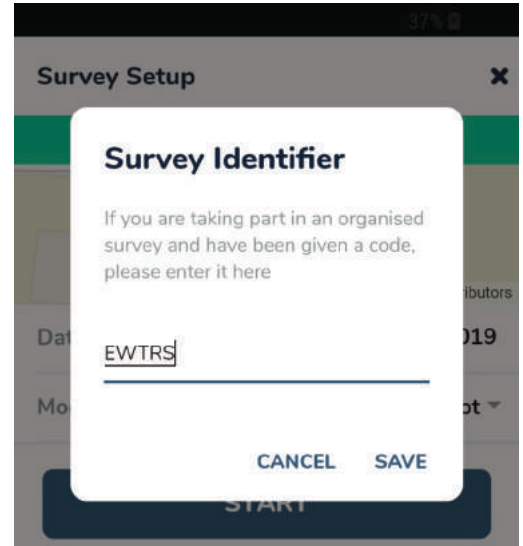
**Click the START SURVEY button to begin**





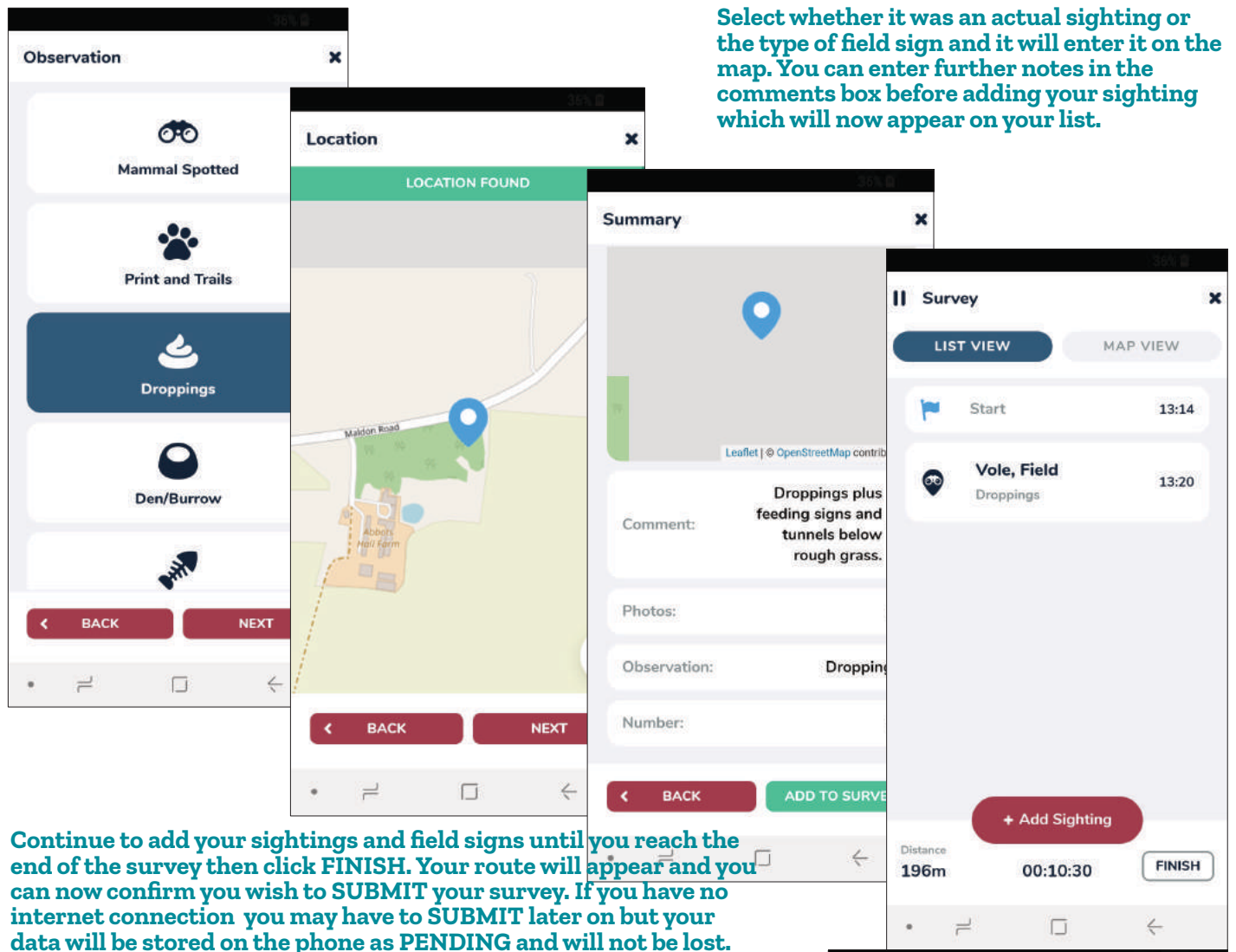
Your phone will search for your location and if there is a signal you will see a map of your start point and the date.

Mode of Transport - select On Foot  
Sitename - If you know the name or code of your Riversearch site enter it here.  
Survey ID type EWTRS



Start your survey and begin walking - your distance will show and the time you have taken. When you see any signs or sightings click + Add Sighting and if possible take a photo. You can now choose the species from the included list of mammals.





Once you have submitted your survey you will see a map with your start, finish, route and various mammal records. Thank you for taking part!

